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Zart Dombourian-Eby
Flutist-Piccoloist, Seattle Symphony
Member, Seattle Symphony & Opera Players' Organization (SSOPO)

Interviewee: Zart Dombourian-Eby

Interviewers: Rachel Reyes

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ZART DOMBOURIAN-EBY 00:00:15: Okay, got it now. I'm all here. I'm all yours.

RACHEL REYES 00:00:17: Alright. My name is Rachel Reyes and this is Zart Dombourian-ebby. She is a piccoloist of the Seattle Symphony. First, I just have a really general question: how has the quarantine and social distancing affected your work?

ZART 00:00:35: That's a big question (*laughs*). Well, my symphony work has, as we know, it has come to a complete halt. We're—they came down—the management came down to our rehearsal on March 11, right in the middle of rehearsal and sent us home, and we have not been back since then. At this point, the earliest possible date is to go back in the fall. Normally, we resume the—haven't heard a specific schedule, but normally resume Tuesday, that's a week and a day after Labor Day, but as far as currently— As far as symphony goes, what I am, and a lot of musicians have been doing, is we've been very active on social media, doing things to support the Seattle Symphony, like making these— They have a series of morning notes that are—they're supposed to be about ninety seconds long of you just playing in your house. We've produced a bunch of those. I'm about to be in—Jeffrey Barker and I recorded a duet that was used as part of a fundraising drive for the Symphony. And then I'm in the

middle of—one of our musicians has taken over doing the tiny tots concerts, which is for babies through about three years old—introducing them to instruments and stuff. We're working on one now for the flute section. That will involve recording various pieces. So, that's what I've done from the symphony standpoint. Should we stop there for now, or do you want me to talk about other things?

RACHEL 00:02:26: You can talk about other things. I know you also have your own private studio.

ZART 00:02:30: Right. I'm teaching between six to eight students per week on Zoom. One or two I have to do on Skype because they don't—we're learning so much about computers and technology—but those lessons are going well. Basically, I haven't had anybody drop out. One student moved back to Korea, but, otherwise, I'm seeing my normal assortment of students, some weekly, some every other week. I'm hoping this summer to do some outdoor teaching—at least do some duet playing from—me standing in my back[yard] on my upper deck and the other flutist standing on the lower deck and—so that—that'll be helpful. One of my biggest sorrows has been that there's not a way to play duets in real time right now because of the latency issue. Then, let's see, I've also been doing—and I got Geoffrey Barker to join me in doing this—we've been doing master classes for the [Seattle] Youth Symphony [Orchestra] flute section once a week. We did it for seven weeks and did a different major excerpt for flute every week with the kids playing for us, or, if they have bad Zoom connections, they submitted a recording ahead of time and we'd listen and watch it as part of the session. Let's see. Wait, I was thinking about something else. I also was part of a— Man, this is sounding like a lot. No wonder I felt so busy. (*computer dings in background*) Sorry. Did you hear that bing just now? That was my e-mail. Sorry, I'll turn it off. Let's see. Early on, I recorded a part for the National Flute Association, got involved— Did you see the Amanda Harberg thing the other day?

RACHEL 00:04:54: Yeah, was that the thing JoAnn Falletta conducted?

ZART 00:04:57: Yes.

RACHEL 00:04:58: Oh, that was so great.

ZART 00:05:00: Yeah, so I recorded a part to that. Ninety-four flutes from seventeen countries or something like that ["The Prayer Project"], a specially written piece. That was very—that was a long, long time ago. So it was fun—it was great to finally see it in its full form and I thought they did a great job on putting that together, not just having blocks of people, but going back and forth between different people. That was very cool. Nicola Mazzanti, who's a piccolo player in Florence, Italy, started doing some master classes on livestream Facebook. Then he got several of his colleagues from around the world to do them. So, I did one of those a couple of weeks ago. What else have I done? I was thinking there was something else, and now I've forgotten, but maybe we'll remember if there was something else. It's been a wide array of things. Not anything that I would have normally done, but, you know, it's kind of interesting and stretches you a little bit.

RACHEL 00:06:17: My next question was—it sounds like you already kind of touched on it, but—because you mentioned how you had all of these other opportunities now. Would you say that you've had more—I don't want to say fulfilling, but are there opportunities besides the ones you've mentioned that have arisen because of our technology now?

ZART 00:06:42: Oh, well, of course. All of this wouldn't have been possible, say, ten years ago, right? None of this would have been possible, pretty much. So, yeah, technology has made a huge difference. Does it replace live? No. I really still miss playing live. I feel like things like the lessons—all these things—for one thing, they keep you busy, and they're something to keep in touch with people. Even like you and me, we wouldn't be doing this otherwise, right? I think that keeping in touch with people has been good for both sides. I think especially my high school students that are a little bit isolated—I think they probably are glad to see somebody besides their parents. The adults that I teach, they more have families and have things going on, but it's still nice to touch base with them.

I consider myself really lucky because even though we stopped working at the—on March 11, we were fully paid through the middle of April, our full regular salary. Then, the symphony got the payroll protection plan money and we were—now we're on, let's see—we're all getting base scale. It's a—it's a reduction for most people, but it's still pretty decent. That's going to run out. It's going to be shrinking, but we've been pretty well paid through now, and I know I'm really lucky in that way because so many musicians—freelance musicians—it's really, really tough. It's really hard. Even the [Pacific Northwest] Ballet orchestra, they don't know when they're going to come back. And, again, they're getting paid some but a lot of these other people just are not. Like the Youth Symphony sectional, I did for free, and all the symphony stuff I'm doing for free. "For free," although I'm getting paid my salary. My private lessons, I reduced my fee by a third, because I figured it's just not as effective and people have more limited resources right now. So, anyway—so that—sorry, I wandered outside—that was not exactly your question. You were talking about technology. So, yeah, technology has made a lot more things possible than they would have ever done before me. If this had happened ten years ago, we wouldn't have had nearly these outlets to do this kind of stuff.

RACHEL 00:09:49: I really, really appreciate how you talk about so many—cover so many things too, because I don't know anything about being a symphony musician. I've been hearing so many—a lot of hurt about—because a lot of people my age depend on gigs, but they don't have that overarching protection. So I'm glad that many musicians still do.

ZART 00:10:15: But it's tough. I mean, it's really—it's really terrible. I know, and I feel terrible for all the people—and I'm glad that there are various funds that have been set up and stuff, but I know it's not—it's not the same. So, I know it's really difficult.

RACHEL 00:10:35: Aside from that, have you had any—do you feel—Okay, I need to backtrack (*laughs*). Do you feel like you're more busy now because of having to fill in all the time? You mentioned that you're doing master classes, sectionals, and then you still teach, but then you're also recording a lot more for the symphony.

ZART 00:10:55: And I get out and walk for an hour every day also, which is really important for my mental health. But, yeah, I do feel more busy. And my husband is working. His job is still continuing. He's working totally from home, but I think he feels more busy than ever before. I don't know if it's because—I mean, I definitely do a lot every day. Some of it is spending time online trying to research, What do they really think about how far does the flute spray come out? Or, what are the current numbers in King County? I know I do a lot—a lot of my time goes into that as well, or answering emails, or trying to take care of projects that have been on the back-burner for me for a while. It actually feels busier. I feel very busy every day. I have not been bored. Sometimes it's just a matter of getting myself going and doing whatever it is I need to do.

RACHEL 00:12:11: Our [University of Washington] Wind Ensemble has been having chats with professional musicians and professional composers, and there's something Professor Tim Salzman always asks. I know he asked Mr. [John] DiCesare—

ZART 00:12:22: The tuba player.

RACHEL 00:12:26: He tends to ask all of our guests where they feel the future of music is going. I think he does it in a—I don't want to say cynical, but I think he's asking in a way just thinking that we won't be able to get back into music. But do you think anything, have any thoughts on that question?

ZART 00:12:51: Well, immediate future is going to be difficult. I think long term future will be—I think it'll be fine in the end. I don't know how long that will take, but I think it will be fine. The country has—the world has gone through things like this before, and eventually—you know, the 1918 flu that people talk about all the time—things were terrible and things were shut down, but eventually things get back. I do think that it will expand possibilities for—there will be more digital streaming of concerts. But I think that eventually it will be on top of the normal concert experience. I think it'll just expand our audiences across the country and across the world, rather than replacing live music here. 'Cause I don't think anything compares to live music. Thinking about movies instead, for example, it's hard for me to think about movie theaters ever really coming back, or coming back. They were already kind of—they're not nearly like they used to be, even when I was a kid, all these neighborhood theaters and all this stuff. They've become these conglomerate things now more, but even then I—if you can watch pretty much anything you want to watch from the comfort of your own home in your pajamas, there's not—I guess some people would argue the big screen is comparable to live music, but I don't think it's the same. I just don't think it's the same. I think—I'm hoping, and I'm always an optimist—I'm hoping that it will be back like it was but enhanced by these other things that we now know are possible. And I really hope

that somebody figures out the latency issue so that you can play duets with people in real time. I'm curious; what did John DiCesare have to say?

RACHEL 00:15:16: I think he was mainly talking about how he thinks it'll be fine, but then he was also talking about how, if it's not, then he said he'd probably be okay. I think he went into that thinking more, because he was also a former band director and a symphony musician. He was—I think he more went at it, instead of if the symphony's gone, then I can still teach music than if music is gone in general.

ZART 00:15:54: Interesting because I would think it might be the other way around. I might—I think that he could be that symphonic music by the Seattle Symphony could happen sooner than music at a university—ensembles at a university. But just to give you some—just a little thing, John DiCesare has been very, very active in all of these electronic things, and I think he is—I don't know how much he knew before, but he really knows a lot about putting all these things together. He's been one of the really standout musicians as far as our presence online.

RACHEL 00:16:42: The Seattle Symphony has been doing so much.

ZART 00:16:44: We have been doing a lot. We've been doing a lot, which I think everybody feels really good about. It's something that you can do that hopefully helps.

RACHEL 00:16:44: Aside from music, have you been able—or maybe not aside from music in general, but in your own personal [inaudible] _____ I know you said you go on walks every day for an hour. Have you been able to pick up things that you haven't been able to because you're so busy?

ZART 00:17:16: (*Sighs*) I keep thinking that I am going to, but I haven't gotten there yet. I have a list of all these things. The other thing is, people are—there's so many things online now. I have a long list of things that I want to listen to or watch, like Dennis Bouriakov's stuff online. Have you watched any of his stuff? His Prokofiev Sonata—oh my god, it's amazing. And there are all these things that come up and, Oh I want to watch that or I want to read about that. So, it's probably been more along those lines. Oh! I have made a lot of cookies. Made four huge batches of chocolate chip cookies and I have bought—but I have not done a thing about it yet, I've had it probably for four weeks now—a little kit (*holds up yarn llama kit*) to make a little yarn llama for my granddaughter. Actually, that's the thing—I FaceTime. My daughter and her husband and my granddaughter live in Boston, and we FaceTime probably four or five times a week, and, many of those times, I read books to Mimi. I have a whole—I had saved a bunch of my kids' books, but I also went online and bought a couple of the real classics that you normally just tell to kids, but I had the books I could be showing her pictures; Little Red Riding Hood and three bears and stuff. So I often have an hour, an hour and a half storytime with her, and I play my flute for her sometimes, or my Piccolo. I play some of her favorite songs. I've even done a storytime a couple of times with some friends—with the granddaughter of some friends of ours. So, that. Zoom cocktail hours—who would ever thought that you would be doing that? Do those quite a bit. I'm really

actually, probably, just really keeping up with friends and being in touch with friends way more than normal. I have a—I keep a list of people that I want to try to remember to call and it's about twenty-five or thirty people, and I get through it—some people it's just like once a month. I'm not totally organized about it, but I kind of try to keep an eye on and like, Oh, that's somebody I haven't talked to in a while. I talk to my sister usually pretty much every day. My mother-in-law, who lives in Louisiana, also. I've become an expert at Instacart. I order her groceries online for her. That's once a week. Otherwise, I'm not practicing every day. I should be practicing every day, but it feels like there are all these things I have an intention—I have—I intend to practice. My to-do list has practice at the top of it (*holds to do list up to camera*), but it's just—I don't know, other things just tend to happen, it seems like. Anyway, a combination of things, some new things, some old things.

RACHEL 00:20:44: As someone who's very well established in the industry, I know many people my age are kind of—there's a split idea that many people should be taking this time to work harder than ever. So as someone in the—who's well established in the industry, what advice would you give to, say, up-and-coming musicians around my age or younger who are faced with this pandemic and all the time that we have?

ZART 00:21:17: I mean—I don't know. Well, how do you feel about—how's your time? Do you feel busier than ever?

RACHEL 00:21:26: I think because I'm at the end of my degree, I feel like I'm just finishing up the loose ends, like I'm sitting through ensemble discussions, and then I'll go practice. I'm lucky that I haven't had to worry too much because of the quarantine because I do live with my family and I get their support. So, for me, I've been able to practice, but I think, mentally, I am not being as productive as I would if I was back at school with a million things to do.

ZART 00:21:57: Mmhmm, yeah. Sometimes the busier you are, the more productive you are in every way. Like, you get pushed and then you really value that time that you have, and it's always hard for—I've taught a bunch of students over the years that are right where you are now, or even ones that take a year off between undergrad and grad—taught a lot of those through the years, and it's a really hard time. It's really hard to be motivated when you don't have the weekly lesson, the daily ensembles, the chamber music. Even when it's not COVID time, it's just a really tough time. And I'm sure it's also partially—right now with COVID, it's hard to maybe motivate yourself because you don't know what the future is gonna bring, right? I mean, is there a point in—if classical music—live classical music is dead, is there a point to train yourself to get a master's degree in flute, right? Of what use is that going to be? I think it will be of use. I think it will come back, and I think if you can inspire yourself to practice, it's a—

Wow, what a luxury to have all this time to be able to practice. You're not having to finish—you're not having to do class work, you're not—you can focus on things that are—that you never had a chance to

learn before, whether it's pieces, or certain techniques, or you want to work on your double tonguing, or your vibrato sucks and you have to go back and start your vibrato all over again or you've been thinking about an embouchure change for years, or you've been—teachers have told you, "You need to do this, you need to do this," and you never have time to—try to look at this as a time to develop those skills, right? It's still hard to—you still kind of need to have some goals, though, so that's tricky. But you might make yourself—rather than like, Okay, I have this recital coming up, or I'm learning this repertoire for a competition—XYZ competition—and, hopefully, the NFA should be putting up fairly soon its repertoire for next year's. I don't know when that comes out, but keep an eye on that as something to work on. The master class rep, the young artist rep, the piccolo rep. I can't remember if next year is orchestral or solo—and then the—master class, young artists, piccolo—whether it's one or the other and orchestra. I mean, there's four different competitions that you could enter, keep an eye on that, or make yourself a goal of, I'm going to learn all of Andersen Op. 15, and try to play (*computer dings*) them up to tempo. Or, there's that Don—I mean, there's so much stuff online now, you can go crazy. There's that etude of the week thing, you know about that. Going through the Donjon etudes, or I'm gonna learn all the Bach sonatas, and it's also a time where you can really learn pieces, and especially excerpts, in ways that you know that you're supposed to, but you never have the time to. So, do you know about the websites, orchestraexcerpts.com and woodwindexcerpts.com?

RACHEL 00:26:14: I think I might have found it a long time ago.

ZART 00:26:17: They are great, and we've been using these as a resource for these kids, for Youth Symphony, because they have—both of them— They have basically the same rep on both of them mostly. They take the big excerpts, and they play—there are also about five different aural excerpts online, and it plays just the section of the piece that you need to know. So for Brahms Four solo, instead of having to sit through the entire Brahms symphony and the entire fourth movement, it basically starts just a little bit before. Although, of course, it's good to know the entire piece, but at least as a start, you can hear like five different orchestras playing that, those sixteen measures, and hear how different people interpret them, and what the orchestra is doing. With stuff like IMSLP [International Music Score Library Project], you can have the scores to follow along with. You know, you have so much at your disposal. It's really a great time to be able to dig really in depth on things like that. There's also—I don't know if you've discovered this, but YouTube now has a lot of piano accompaniments to flute solos online. Have you been exploring those at all?

RACHEL 00:27:45: Yeah.

ZART 00:27:47: And you know that you can adjust the tempo? Did you know that?

RACHEL 00:27:53: Is that the thing where you can make it half tempo or twice a speed thing?

ZART 00:27:58: But (*computer dings*) now there's also usually a choice. There's an option that says custom and you can put it to any—95% of tempo or 110% of tempo. So playing along—pieces along with that—learn all the Handel sonatas, memorize a different baroque sonata each week. There're goals like that you can do, and are they goals that you would normally have? Eh, probably not, but you—it's kind of like you have to have something to focus (*computer dings*) on rather than just randomly play and flip through your music. Okay, what am I going to do now? But, again, so much is available online. Even though you can't get to the UW music library anymore, there's just so much around.

RACHEL 00:29:06: Last question: you've mentioned that you've been teaching a lot of master classes and you also teach your own students. Do you find that you're utilizing more resources than ever whenever you teach now? Because you just mentioned the orchestra excerpts and the woodwind excerpts—

ZART 00:29:21: Yeah, and pushing IMSLP, and YouTube and stuff like that. Yeah, I definitely am because I feel like there's got to be—it's a little bit of an extra thing that makes up for not being there in person. It's not the same, but it's something and it's not—so the hardest thing to teach online—have you done any online teaching at all? Or have you taken lessons—is Donna teaching?

RACHEL 00:29:49: Yes.

ZART 00:29:51: You know, you can't do sound stuff, and that's a terrible hole in what you can do. Dynamics are so-so (*computer dings*). Most everything else you can get by okay on. So, it doesn't make up for not being able to work on those things, but at least it's something that enriches the experience.

RACHEL 00:30:19: Well, that's pretty much the end of all of my questions. Thank you so much for taking time to talk with me about these things.

ZART 00:30:26: You're welcome. So are you gonna be doing any online festivals, summer classes or anything?

RACHEL 00:30:35: Not really. The gap between when UW ends and when ASU [Arizona State University] starts, because I'm switching from quarter to semester school—I've got that two month period, and pretty much everything's canceled. I do know Aria International Summer [Academy] music festival is still doing online things, but I don't—I should be taking more advantage of these. I was supposed to participate in a community orchestra. It was Helios orchestra, but I think the concert I was supposed to be on also got cancelled because of the pandemic. So I'm just gonna have a summer off for once.

ZART 00:31:12: Marina—I know that Marina Piccinini had a master class last week, but I think that's over now. The other thing that I've heard that's going to be happening is Jeff Zook, who's the piccolo

player of the Detroit Symphony, is going to be doing a masterclass online. But—and then I heard about Aria. Those are the only things that I know about that have moved online for sure. Were you planning on doing something this summer?

RACHEL 00:31:50: I think it was just the community orchestra because I spent so much money on auditions this year.

ZART 00:31:57: Yep, yeah. Anyway, well, good luck! And good luck with the paper. And so have you heard? Who else are you interviewing for this? Or do you have only—

RACHEL 00:32:12: I talked with my former private teacher, Iris Ingram, earlier, and then I also called one of the doctoral students at UW, Eliza, just so I can get a full range of musicians' work for my paper.

ZART 00:32:28: How's Iris doing?

RACHEL 00:32:30: She's doing really well. She was talking about how it's just hard for public school teachers, and especially for her. She only gets a five to ten minute window that she can actually teach her classes because the schools want to prioritize the other subjects, but she was talking about how her own private students are doing pretty well. Mmhmm.

ZART 00:32:50: Yeah, it's really tough. And, for people—we didn't talk about people who have little kids at home, like Donna. That she's got to be taking care of them and getting them to their schooling and—it's crazy. Anyway, well, I hope I'll see you before you leave for Arizona, if you do actually leave.

RACHEL 00:33:13: Thank you. I'm really glad to see you're really healthy and well.

ZART 00:33:17: Thank you, same to you. It's been nice talking to you.

RACHEL 00:33:19: Have a good rest of the day.

ZART 00:33:21: Okay. Bye-bye.

RACHEL 00:33:22: Bye.